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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH REMINDS PARENTS TO GIVE KIDS A HEALTHY START THIS SCHOOL YEAR

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Summer vacation is almost over and children across the Commonwealth will soon be heading back to school. Children need to be healthy to get the most out of their education, so the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) wants every student to be prepared with more than just backpacks and pencils. The VDH “Back to School, Back to Health” publication gives parents and children important information on how to stay safe, fit and healthy this school year.

The publication features eight pages of ways to keep kids safe and healthy. And for the first time, this year’s “Back to School” publication is in both English and Spanish in an effort to reach a larger number of Virginians.

“Back to School, Back to Health” will be distributed July 31 in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, Virginian Pilot and in *Classificados*, a Spanish-language newspaper in Central Virginia. It also will be available in local health department offices statewide and on-line. The publication provides information on eating and exercising properly, making sure children receive the proper immunizations and keeping kids safe when they are home alone.

Here are some topics for parents and children covered in the supplement:

- How can I make sure my child eats right when I can’t be there? More than 84 percent of children and adolescents eat too much total fat. An increasing number of kids are overweight and are dealing with obesity-related health problems. Schools now offer a wider variety of healthy foods, and are cutting down on junk food. Parents can help by staying involved. Post the school menu on the refrigerator and talk to your children about making smart food choices before they head off to the cafeteria.
- How do I make my child be more active and stay away from TV and video games? Growing bodies and minds need physical exercise, but it doesn’t have to be an organized activity. Be creative. Get the whole family involved and break activities into manageable 15-minute segments. Dance to your favorite music or play Frisbee. Even everyday chores, such as sweeping and raking, can help kids stay in shape.
- Is my child old enough and mature enough to stay home alone? Most families have busy schedules, and the reality is that many children will have to stay home alone for short periods of time. All school-age children need to be supervised in some way by a responsible adult. Find ways to supervise when you can’t be there physically, such as setting firm rules, checking in often and making sure your home is safe and secure.

(MORE)

- Which vaccinations are required before my child can go to school? Vaccine-preventable diseases are costly and can lead to hospitalization and premature deaths. Sick children miss days from school and parents lose time from work to take care of them. Required vaccines include diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B, Haemophilus influenza type b, measles, mumps, rubella, polio and varicella.
- Who should get the flu vaccine? Adults and children with conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease need to get the flu vaccine. But you can also prevent the spread of flu and other common illnesses by washing hands frequently and thoroughly, and by using a tissue if you cough or sneeze.

For more information about how to keep your children safe and healthy as they head back to school, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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